

Laudatio

on the occasion of awarding the honorary degree

„doctor honoris causa“

to Prof. Bebo White

Magnificence, Spectabilities, Honorabilities,
Dear candidate for the honoris causa degree,
Dear members of Scientific Board,
Dear colleagues and students,
Distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and a great honour to present this Laudatio to Prof. Bebo White on the occasion of granting him the honorary degree of Doctor Honoris Causa on behalf of the faculty and students of the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava at this ceremonial session of the STU Scientific Board.

Bebo White is an American researcher of the World Wide Web. He is not just one of many scientists, who research this still relatively new phenomenon. He is one of the pioneers who facilitated its birth.

Bebo White originally studied physics. The fact that a pioneer of the World Wide Web did not study Computer Science should not surprise us. Other pioneers of Computer Science were incomers from other fields, too. For example, Edsger Dijkstra, a very prominent figure in the history of Computer Science, was a Dutch physicist, who, as a young researcher, became acquainted with the new kind of device in the laboratory – a computer – and quickly realised its enormous potential. We should also bear in mind that in those early days it was not possible to study Computer Science as a university study programme.

As a physicist, Bebo White joined SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, a research facility operated by the Stanford University. This must indeed a great place for research. At this Laboratory, they built the world's longest particle accelerator. Four Nobel prizes have been awarded for work at SLAC. Having worked in such environment, it was quite logical for Bebo White to choose another prominent institution, in which to spend his sabbatical – CERN. Timing of this CERN sabbatical could not have been better. It was year 1989. That was the time when CERN researchers, having experienced a dramatically growing demand for automatic information-sharing between scientists in universities and institutes around the world, contemplated how to cope with it using the already existing computer network infrastructure. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist at CERN, invented and implemented the World Wide Web in 1989 based on the proposal for “a large hypertext database with typed links”. It was there, where the first website in the world was created. The website was dedicated to the World Wide Web project itself and was hosted on Berners-Lee's NeXT computer.

Bebo White inhaled the inspiring concept that had been emerging at CERN. He understood the potential of the World Wide Web. Having returned back to SLAC, he was instrumental in establishing the first website outside Europe at SLAC in 1991. To put it in the proper context, it was still only the fifth website globally. It should be noted that Bebo White had been shifting from physics to computing-related research. This accomplishment alone makes him one of the pioneers of the World Wide Web.

The World Wide Web had been growing exponentially since 1991. It has become an overwhelming phenomenon that has been changing lives of practically everyone globally. Inevitably, it has become a subject of scientific research. Scientists started to investigate the World Wide Web as a result of an engineering design. Here, Bebo White has been a leading personality of the scientific life. He has been the managing editor of the Journal of Web Engineering, the premier scientific journal of the web engineering community indexed in the database Current Contents – Engineering, Computing & Technology. He is also a member of the steering committee of the International Society for Web Engineering, organizing the series of International Conferences on Web Engineering - ICWE. These are just two of his many activities that include chairing scientific conferences or presenting key lectures on the Web related conferences.

It was at the ICWE 2006 in Palo Alto, where I met Bebo White in person for the first time. I discovered soon that he is not only a prominent scientist, but also great discussant, excellent host and music fan. I had the opportunity to spend long hours with Bebo, full of discussions. I was also amazed with Bebo playing with his Sada Springs Jug Band.

Since then, me and my colleagues started to meet Bebo White regularly, either at the ICWE conferences, Web Science conferences, or more often at the International World Wide Web Conferences. These are conferences with contributed papers that are selected based on a very strict reviewing process. This is the case with any major international scientific conference in the field of computer science. For example, the World Wide Web conference 1998 was the venue, where one of the most influential works in computer science was published. It was the paper “The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine”, authored by Sergey Brinn and Larry Page, the founders of Google. This work influenced every field and everybody. Bebo White served as a member of International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee for full 20 years.

We, myself and several other colleagues from our Faculty who participate at the Web related conferences, established an effective working contact with Bebo White. Based on that, we first invited him to our university in 2010. Bebo White accepted the invitation to deliver key lecture at our student research conference. Besides that, he also took part in a three day workshop with our students at Smolenice. This event is remembered by us as an exceptionally successful meeting that generated a lot of positive energy among our young researchers. More than forty young researchers participated and presented their work at Smolenice. At the same event, Bebo White gave an inspiring talk titled “Clearing Away the Clouds: What is the Future of Cloud Computing?”. Later, Bebo not only discussed the projects with the students till late night, but also opened various provocative questions related to history and future of computing. Some of the workshop participants graduated in the meantime and some of them lecture the new generation of students today. I am glad that I can see them here too.

Since 2010, we have been maintaining a close working contact with Bebo White. It resulted in Bebo White's acceptance of our invitation to deliver a key address at our student research conference this year. Bebo White also delivers a spring school dedicated to the very hot topic of cryptocurrencies and blockchain. The event is attended not only by our students. It is a privilege for us that such a prominent lecturer offers a spring school at our university.

It is a privilege for our university to award a doctoral degree to Professor Bebo White, the ACM Distinguished speaker, one of the pioneers of the World Wide Web, and related fields of Web Science and Web Engineering.